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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: CHAVALIT FOLDS; WHO'S DEALING NOW?

REF: A. BANGKOK 3033 (CHAVALIT EXITS WITH EMPTY HANDS)
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 141 (SEARCHING FOR WAYS AHEAD)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mike Morrow, CG, ConGen, Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (S) Mark Tamthai, the RTG's point-man for secret talks with southern insurgents, told CG October 8 that Deputy PM Chavalit had resigned after being undercut by the Prime Minister, the Army, and faction leaders inside his own party. Tamthai expressed little regret over his departure and the accompanying death of Chavalit's hastily announced plan to resolve the conflict in the South. However, Tamthai lamented the likelihood of continued RTG neglect of the southern conflict. Remaining players include the NSC Secretary General who is more forcefully speaking out against dialogue, the Army Commander-in-Chief who favors a non-military solution but firmly defers to the civilian government to lead the peace process, and the Prime Minister who is besieged by domestic political crisis. Meanwhile, insurgent exile leaders involved in the secret dialogue fear lack of results could cause them to be eclipsed by hardliners.

[1](#)2. (S) Comment: Political conflict in Bangkok has left the secret dialogue on hold, and has caused the postponement of a Parliament-sponsored conference on southern issues planned for October 11. A pilot peace plan for Yala city that Tamthai has championed is also in abeyance. Tamthai remains confident that insurgent exile leaders engaged in the dialogue are ones who can influence insurgent commanders on the ground - something he thinks cannot be said for the variety of other channels that have recently cropped up. However, he is concerned that insurgent commanders inside Thailand are becoming more independent from the exile leaders. End Summary and Comment.

Chavalit's Death by A Thousand Cuts

[1](#)3. (S) CG met October 8 in Chiang Mai with Mark Tamthai, Director of Payap University's Institute of Religion, Culture and Peace and point-man for the RTG's secret dialogue with southern insurgents. Tamthai had just returned from Bangkok, and said Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth had quit after being undercut by Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, the

Royal Thai Army (RTA), and governing People's Power Party (PPP) heavyweight Newin Chidchob (see Ref A for more).

So Who's Handling the South for RTG?

¶4. (S) Although Tamthai expressed little regret over Chavalit's departure, he continues to lament the RTG's neglect of the southern conflict since interim, coup-appointed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont left office early this year. Tamthai provided a quick snapshot of various RTG players still in the picture:

-- NSC Secretary General Surapon Puanaiyaka is reasserting himself into the picture, and in unhelpful ways. He recently addressed a gathering of Thai intelligence officials and spoke out against empowerment or autonomy for southern Muslims, asserting that Muslims were violent by nature and incapable of governing themselves peacefully. Moreover, Surapon continues to freeze funding for the NSC-led secret talks, as he has done since taking office last spring. Furthermore, Tamthai worries that Surapon has the ear of RTA Commander Anupong, as they were pre-cadet school classmates (along with former PM Thaksin) and Surapon has academic credentials that Anupong lacks.

-- RTA Commander Anupong Paochinda remains cautious in his approach to the South, believing firmly that leadership of the peace process must come from the civilian government, not the Army. Some interpret Anupong's refusal to push the peace process as evidence that he is taking an increasingly harder line toward the South. Tamthai, however, believes Anupong is committed to the peace process and the need for a non-military solution.

-- Ministry of Justice Permanent Secretary Kittipong Kiyayarak was praised by Tamthai as creative and not in the overly cautious mold of most Thai governing officials. He praised

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Kittipong as pushing hard for judicial reform in the South.

-- PM Somchai is obviously preoccupied with the country's ongoing domestic political crisis. The three players listed above all have his ear on the southern issue, with their conflicting views vying for his attention.

Multiple Tracks Lead in Different Directions

¶5. (S) Tamthai pined for the RTG's previous, more coordinated approach to the peace process under former PM Surayud. At that time there were three separate but coordinated tracks of peace talks:

-- Tamthai's RTG-insurgent secret dialogue facilitated by the Henri Dunant Centre (HDC);

-- a Malaysian-sponsored track focused on economic development and education, which lost steam after PM Badawi announced he would step down next March; and

-- an Indonesian-sponsored track that got hijacked by Vice President Kalla (see para 6).

¶6. (S) After Surayud left office and RTG neglect of the peace process set in, new and uncoordinated channels have sprung up, mostly led by individuals seeking to boost their political standing with various audiences:

-- a self-serving, feckless "cease-fire" initiative sponsored by former Thai Army Commander Chetta in July;

-- the September 20-21 talks hosted by Indonesian VP Kalla, which Tamthai said mainly involved an old Pattani-based group that was no longer operationally relevant; and

-- Chavalit's ill-fated effort that was part self-promotion and died quickly due to lack of support by the Thai army and government. Tamthai said this also mainly involved a group of southern leaders who had little or no influence over operations in the South.

¶7. (S) Tamthai observed that the insurgent exile leaders involved in the RTG secret dialogue initially jumped at each of the initiatives launched in recent months. He read this as a "sense of urgency" on their part to make progress in the peace process. He cited three possible motivations for this urgency:

-- the insurgents want to talk to "people who matter" in the RTG and were trying to figure out who was who in the various free-lance efforts;

-- they participated merely to scoop up the generous "per diem" handouts associated with each of the new channels (in contrast, Tamthai said, the RTG secret dialogue does not provide cash payments; instead the HDC provides plane tickets and hotel accommodation for insurgent participants); or

-- insurgent exile leaders involved in the secret dialogue fear that if they don't deliver tangible results soon, they could get eclipsed by more hardline members of their groups (one such group, PULO, has leadership elections soon, Tamthai said).

Pilot Yala Peace Plan Put on Hold

¶8. (S) Despite the sense of urgency Tamthai detects on the part of the insurgent exile leaders, he admitted that they have cooled to the pilot peace zone plan for Yala city (Ref B). Although new RTA Fourth Army Commander Pichet Wisaichorn is reportedly ready to move forward with the plan, the insurgents have gotten cold feet because they sense that neither General Anupong nor the RTG leadership is on board. Thus implementation is in abeyance. (Comment: The insurgents may also be put off by the fact that the prisoner release element of the plan has been dropped, per Ref B).

Mid-October Meeting Also on Hold

¶9. (S) A large conference in the southern city of Narathiwat planned for October 11 by the Parliamentary Subcommittee on the

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Reduction of Southern Violence has been postponed, Tamthai reported. The meeting was supposed to have brought together government and military officials, academicians, and local leaders to discuss topics such as special administrative zones and judicial reform. But Parliament has postponed the meeting for at least 10 days due to political strife in Bangkok, though the publicly stated reason will be budget issues.

Secret Dialogue on Hold, Too

¶10. (S) No date is set for the next round of RTG-insurgent talks, Tamthai said. This is mainly due to domestic political uncertainty in Bangkok, but the funding freeze imposed by NSC SYG Surapon is also an issue. Tamthai remains confident that the exile leaders involved in the dialogue are those who can influence insurgent commanders on the ground. "We've been doing this for two years now," he said, and the participants have been thoroughly vetted by the Thai, Malay and Indonesian intelligence services, all of which "tell us these are the right guys." However, later in the conversation Tamthai observed that the insurgent commanders inside Thailand were becoming more independent from the exile leaders. He would like to get the "insiders" involved in the dialogue, but admitted that the risk

of exposing themselves made this unrealistic.

11. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
MORROW